
John Neihardt, in the summer of 1930, had his portentous first meeting at Pine Ridge, South Dakota, with the Lakota holy man, Black Elk. On his return home to Branson, Missouri, Neihardt announced that he had arranged to go back the next summer for extended interviews with Black Elk, which were eventually to form the basis for the influential book *Black Elk Speaks*. Neihardt appointed his daughter Enid, who was 19 years old in 1931 and who knew shorthand, to be the expedition's stenographer, and gave Hilda, who was then only 14, the title of "official observer."

*Black Elk and Flaming Rainbow: Personal Memories of the Lakota Holy Man and John Neihardt* is Hilda’s dutiful, though considerably belated, “official” report of what she saw in 1931, of her subsequent visit to Pine Ridge in 1944, and of her sustained contacts with Black Elk's family. The book also includes her family’s history and sufficient background on John Neihardt’s work to make it a coherent self-contained volume.

There is some controversy, nicely handled in Julian Rice's book *Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose* (1991), as to what exactly were Black Elk’s personal religious commitments as a mature man. At the time of Neihardt’s visit in 1931, Black Elk had been an active, proselytizing Roman Catholic for fully thirty years, and some people have claimed that he had renounced his traditional Lakota beliefs. It seems to me that the weight of the evidence shows that Black Elk, at least from 1931 to his death, held true to a central Lakota core. Otherwise, why would he have spent the last decades of his life trying to ensure the survival and transmission of the Lakota world view and of his personal visions?

Hilda Neihardt has no doubt at all that Black Elk was fundamentally a Lakota holy man who became a Catholic for practical, political reasons. In his words, as recalled by Hilda (p.20), he converted “because my children have to live in this world.” It seems highly possible to me that Black Elk could have been simultaneously and sincerely both Roman Catholic and traditional Lakota. Both faiths can be inclusive and even syncretistic enough to allow for this, and surely Black Elk was no stranger to religious innovation and experimentation.

Hilda Neihardt was present when Black Elk recounted his great visions and also at the famous journey to Harney Peak in 1931. It is obvious from her telling of these things that she was very taken by Black Elk's strength of character and that she fully believed in the truth of his visions. She can perhaps be counted as one of his earliest non-Native followers.
There is also considerable discussion in the academic world about the degree to which Neihardt changed and reshaped the Black Elk material to conform to Neihardt's religious and philosophical point of view. Hilda's book does not treat this issue directly, but she does stress that the recording and translation of Black Elk's works were done with great attention to accuracy.

Generally speaking, *Black Elk and Flaming Rainbow* is well written and entertaining. I particularly enjoyed the colourful details that Hilda provided about the dusty and difficult world of motoring in the early 1930s. She also writes well about horseback riding, Reservation life of the time, cross cultural understanding and misunderstandings, family life, and women's issues.

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Reference

Rice, Julian


This volume is part of the reprinting in the *Sources of American Indian Oral Literature Series*, edited by Douglas Parks and Raymond DeMallie, of Apache myths and tales obtained by Opler in the 1930s, and published originally as *Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*. The Jicarilla volume was first published in 1938 as no. 31 of that series. Also reprinted are volumes with narratives of the Chiricahua Apache and the Lipan Apache.

This Jicarilla volume is very full, some 140 narratives in all, yet Opler begins by explaining what he has left out (p.xix). I understand that Scott Rushforth, who wrote the introduction to this volume, is working with the unpublished materials. I certainly hope that his efforts will result in the publication of "a long story of the adventures of a group of animals" and the adventures of Blue Jay, who has the power to ordain characteristics and